



Michael Sapraticone

Sapraticone: Lessons from Normandy and Times Square

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More than a year later it is still a puzzlement, but according to European observers the owners of the now shuttered Normandy Tank Museum faced exorbitant operating costs due, in part, to high taxes, a blizzard of costly regulations and a hostile local government that offered no assistance in building tourism traffic.

It is a cautionary tale for those who envision their museum to be the epicenter of interest for whatever its assigned mission. The simple truth is that without a business model museums will fail.

In addition to running a not-for-profit like a business, there's the need to be a federally recognized 501(c)(3). That designation sends a strong message to potential corporate sponsors, government tourism agencies and possible board members that this is a serious undertaking with a legal structure reviewed and approved by the IRS. Attracting board members is equally crucial for any

museum, even urban-based cultural institutions that currently welcome millions of visitors, because they can't meet its budget based solely on gate admissions. They need the help and financial support of an effective board. But perhaps one of the most important elements for success is a local government that recognizes the economic power of destinations that draw visitors from afar. Normandy was indifferent to a museum in its midst and it paid the price. Whether it's a museum, a winery or an art gallery, tourists will determine the fate of these kinds of locations, and local government has a responsibility to be an engaged partner in gaining the attention of potential visitors. Here in our bi-county region Nassau and Suffolk counties direct millions of dollars generated by hotel taxes into Discover Long Island, an entity that is essentially the region's tourism agency and whose challenge is to raise Long Island's profile among national and international visitors. That task is easier said than done when the organization is required to work from a severely limited budget in one of the most expensive media markets in the United States.

That is why the recent announcement by Discover Long Island's President and CEO Kristen Jarnagin has been met with rousing cheers by those across Long Island waiting for visitors to knock on their doors. Discover Long Island and NYC & Company have announced a formal collaboration to promote what they are calling "NYCplus," with a tag line that Long Island is "New York City's Beachfront Backyard."

On the surface, this means Long Island is now part of the marketing outreach of this powerful New York City-based tourism group, inviting city visitors to extend their experience by traveling to Long Island for a day, a weekend or even a week. At the moment this effort targets Canada and Australia, as research shows these two countries provide this pilot program with the best chance for success.

Funded by an Empire State Development Regional Economic Development Council grant, there is much more to this unprecedented level of cooperation than statistics and targeted digital marketing. For generations, New York City has been indifferent to Long Island and its economy. Manhattan-based boldface names viewed the island as one long landing approach to the Hamptons.

Jarnagin has done something extraordinary. She convinced NYC & Company to look at Long Island not as incidental real estate but an integral partner worthy of its collaborative efforts, adding value to the experience of visitors. A relative newcomer to the island, perhaps it was Jarnagin's benign ignorance of our longstanding passive-aggressive relationship with neighboring New York City that allowed her to work her magic. Certainly the regional economic council recognized the merits, given that New York City and Long Island are the top two destination drivers for New York State, comprising of nearly 75 percent of all state-wide traveler spending in 2016, according to a recent report by Tourism Economics.

No matter. Discover Long Island and NYC & Company are now embarked on a journey that creates a pathway for future joint-marketing opportunities, which can only benefit our region's economy.

Sapraicone is the founder and president of Squad Security in Uniondale and a board member of the Museum of American Armor at Old Bethpage Village Restoration.